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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2008AG0004-000184
Feb. 11, 2008

Ministry of Attorney General
and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism

NEW AWARDS RECOGNIZE EXCELLENCE IN CULTURAL DIVERSITY

VICTORIA – To honour and celebrate British Columbia's cultural diversity and indigenous communities, the Province will recognize exceptional work in bringing B.C.'s diverse cultures together with the Nesika Awards, Attorney General and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism Wally Oppal and provincial Multicultural Advisory Council chair John Halani announced today.

"Multiculturalism is key in building welcoming and inclusive communities that honour the past and build positive, new relationships with local citizens and new immigrants to British Columbia," said Oppal. "Our province is building on the strength of cultural diversity by linking creativity, talent and technology. The Nesika Awards will highlight our strength in cultural diversity and recognize excellence among individuals, organizations and communities."

Nesika (Ne-SAY-ka) is Chinook jargon for "we, us, our." It comes from a trade language used by many different Aboriginal linguistic groups along the west coast of North America. Chinook jargon was used extensively in British Columbia during the 19th and early 20th centuries to help Aboriginal people communicate, first among themselves and then with European newcomers.

Award nominees are required to demonstrate exceptional work in creating welcoming environments in one of three categories: individuals, organizations and communities. Awards of $5,000 will be provided to winners to donate to a non-profit organization of their choice.

"We urge British Columbians to nominate worthy individuals, communities and organizations – our champions of cultural diversity," Halani said in launching the awards at the start of Multiculturalism Week, Feb. 10 to 16. "These awards will spotlight the phenomenal work we know is occurring in our communities."

"We're honoured to have the Nesika Awards as a part of British Columbia's special year of celebration, BC150," said Stan Hagen, Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts. "These new awards acknowledge the important contributions of First Nations and other cultural groups to building our richly diverse province. What better way to recognize their efforts than by celebrating the leadership they have brought to promoting cultural diversity?"

"Multiculturalism week is a time to take stock and celebrate our commitments to safe, secure and economically vibrant communities for newcomers and to break down barriers to equal opportunities for immigrants," said Dave S. Hayer, parliamentary secretary for multiculturalism.

The awards will encourage all British Columbians, newcomers and those who have been here for generations alike, to realize their full potential by reaffirming the importance of inclusiveness and respect for each other, Oppal added.

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Nominations for the Nesika Awards close Sept. 15, 2008. Information about nominations is available at: www.WelcomeBC.ca. Selected nominees will receive their awards in fall 2008.

The inauguration of the Nesika Awards is a component of BC150, a celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Crown Colony of British Columbia in 1858. Every community in B.C. is invited to participate in this year-long celebration of B.C.'s cultural diversity, community strength and widespread achievement.

For more information on BC150 programs and events, visit: www.bc150.ca.

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2 backgrounder(s) attached.

Media contact: Dave Townsend
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NESIKA AWARDS PROGRAM

Categories and eligibility

- The awards recognize excellence in leadership in bringing B.C.'s diverse cultures together.
- Any living person whose main residence is in B.C. can be nominated for an individual award.
- Organizations must have an office in the province. This includes, but is not limited to, non-profit organizations, service clubs or groups, educational institutions, hospitals, unions, professional and trade associations, media organizations and public, private or Crown corporations. Government ministries and Multicultural Advisory Council (MAC) or selection panel members may not be nominated.
- Any group that identifies itself as a community located in B.C. is eligible. This includes, but is not limited to, municipalities, First Nations, neighbourhoods and cultural and intercultural groups. An initiative cannot be nominated in more than one category in any one calendar year. All initiatives must be active or have ended less than three years prior to Sept. 15, 2008.

Selection of award recipients

- MAC will appoint an independent selection panel that is objective, respected and knowledgeable about multiculturalism and anti-racism. The process of evaluating nominees and selecting winners is at the discretion of the independent selection panel. Selection panel judges will choose award recipients based on the reach and impact of nominees' achievements, including their answers to eight key questions on the nomination form.

Award recipients

- Winners in each category will receive cash awards of $5,000 each to donate to a community organization. The award winner in the organizations category may keep the award, provided the organization meets the qualifications.
- Recipients will be provided with a travel allowance to attend the awards ceremony in fall 2008.

Closing date for nominations

- Nominations are due by Monday, Sept. 15, at 4:30 p.m. Nomination packages, including four copies of all documents, must be delivered in person or by registered mail or courier to:

The Nesika Awards Selection Committee
Settlement and Multiculturalism Division
Ministry of Attorney General
5th floor 605 Robson St.
Vancouver, B.C. V6B 5J3

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Nomination forms, materials and information

- Nesika Awards nomination materials and details are available online at: www.WelcomeBC.ca.

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B.C.'S MULTICULTURAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

B.C.'s Multicultural Advisory Council (MAC) advises the Minister responsible for Multiculturalism, Attorney General Wally Oppal, on multiculturalism and racism. Members, who are appointed by Cabinet and are volunteers, are representative of multicultural diversity.

The MAC meets approximately four times a year, throughout B.C., to consult with communities on multicultural issues and develop recommendations for action. Members include:

- Chair John Halani, owner/operator of the Tropicana Hotel and Robsonstrasse Hotel in Vancouver;
- Vice-chair Edmond C. Luke, a partner in Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP;
- Mahmood A. Awan, president of Premier Transmissions;
- Johnny Fong, president of International Sources Limited in B.C.;
- Dennis K. Hori, who practises law at Fulton and Company in Kamloops;
- Dr. David Chuenyan Lai, geography professor at the University of Victoria;
- Yonah Kim Martin, a teacher at Banting Middle School in Coquitlam;
- Malkit Mutti, an insurance agent and advisor with the North American Life Insurance Company;
- Raj Singh Pagely, a retired teacher and business person who is active in the community;
- Michelle A. Rakotonaivo, early childhood director of Gracepoint Community Church;
- Gurdip Singh Sahota, a computer support and information technology graduate;
- Randy Ranjit Sandhu, vice-president of the National Indo Canadian Council for B.C. and a member of the Khalsa Diwan Society;
- Andrée St. Martin, executive director of the Arts Council of New Westminster;
- Jan Walls, professor of Chinese at Simon Fraser University; and
- Dr. Mark Wexler, a Simon Fraser University professor with expertise in business, society and ethics issues.

Detailed biographies are located at: www.ag.gov.bc.ca/immigration/pdf/NesikaMACBios.pdf.

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